

GRACE BIBLE CHURCH

Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries

The Doctrine of The Divine Decree

The Divine Decree of God refers to his eternal [always existed], holy [having perfect integrity], wise [application of omniscience to creation] and sovereign purpose. God simultaneously comprehended all things that ever were or ever would be. He comprehended every event that would ever take place, along with its causes and interaction with other events, and he knew in eternity past every decision mankind would ever make.

God knew simultaneously in eternity past everything that would happen in human history [the thoughts, actions, and decisions of each and every person]. Because our understanding is limited, we perceive these things only in partial aspects and logical relations that come from Scripture. Therefore, mankind classifies the Decree as being plural [Decrees], but in reality, there is only one Decree.

The term 'Divine Decree' is an attempt to gather into one designation that which the Scriptures refer to by various designations, such as Divine purpose, **Ephesians 1:11**, determinate counsel, **Acts 2:23**, foreknowledge, **1 Peter 1:2 cf 1:20**, election, **1 Thessalonians 1:4**, predestination, **Romans 8:30**, Divine will, **Ephesians 1:11**, and Divine good pleasure, **Ephesians 1:9**.

This is a very technical study, but it is very important to understand because it is a reminder that before man existed, God had us all personally in mind. This principle is discussed in **Ephesians 1:3-6**, *Blessed [be] the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

The Decree of God is His eternal and immutable will with regard to all future events, and the precise manner and order of their occurrence, **Ephesians 1:11**, *Also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose Who works all things after the counsel of His will.* The word 'Decree' refers to the eternal plan by which God has rendered all of the events of the universe as certain. This includes past, present and future angelic and human history. The Decree of God is the chosen and adopted plan of God for all of His works. It is His eternal purpose according to the counsels of His own

will whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained all that will ever come to pass, **Isaiah 43:7**, *“Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”*

Proverbs 16:4 *The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

2 Timothy 1:8-9 *Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of Our Lord or of me, His prisoner, but join with [me] in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.*

The Decree is the all-inclusive will and purpose of God concerning all that ever was or ever will be – all of which originates totally within Himself. God is omniscient, so in one moment of time He knew everything that would ever take place. Our life hangs by a very fine thread; it exists for His glory and for His satisfaction, and this should cause all believers to take their calling and their election seriously.

The Decree of God was simultaneous and not determined in stages. However, due to the finite understanding of man, we must perceive aspects of the Decree in a logical and chronological progression. The Decree of God is efficacious, meaning that it determines all that ever was, all that is, and all that ever will be. However, the Decree is viewed by man from two standpoints:

1. It is viewed from the standpoint of the word ‘efficacious’, which refers to that which is directly brought about by God from His sovereignty.
2. It is viewed from the standpoint of permissiveness, which refers to that which is appointed by God to be accomplished by secondary causes, or by the free will and action of agents [volition of man]. From this comes the concept that the sovereignty of God and the free will of man coexist in human history by Divine Decree.

Five Characteristics of the Divine Decree

1. **All comprehensive.** Not the slightest uncertainty could exist as to one of the smallest of events without confusion to all. Therefore, all events in the life of each individual are interwoven and interdependent. God is not the author of confusion. Everything we think, why we think it, and the environment in which we think it were all known to God in eternity past. Every part of life is a chain of cause and effect events. This is one of the meanings behind such passages as **Luke 12:6-7**, *“Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? [Yet] not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.”* It may not seem to us that our life

has been blended perfectly together by God, but when we get to Heaven, we will understand that it was! God is perfect, and therefore He gave us life at the exact time that He knew would be the best time and the best environment for each of us. He chose our parents, the color of our skin, our gender, and everything else about us. God decreed for each of these things to exist.

2. **Eternal.** God is not gaining in knowledge. What God knows at any given time, He has always known. Omniscience means that God knew simultaneously everything that ever was or would be in their causes, conditions, successions, and relations. Understanding the omniscience of God is a great factor in understanding the Divine Decree, which is all of the eternal and simultaneous knowledge of omniscience expressing the will of God, by which all things are brought into being and controlled and made subject to His divine pleasure, resulting in His eternal glory.
3. **Perfect.** The Decree of God is not perfect in content, because it includes evil, sin and human failure. However, since God always knew everything that would ever happen, His is a perfect system of comprehension. It does not always appear that way, though, as events relate to us, because we have a tendency to be relative and temporal and not realize that God sees the end of what He's doing, **Deuteronomy 32:4**, *“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He.”*
4. **Unchangeable and certain.** Nothing can occur that would ever necessitate a change. God is never caught not knowing. God has never had to make any changes or any adjustments in the Divine Decree.
5. **The free choice of God in eternity past.** This is the most important point to understand, but one which many theologians do not. God is not bound to follow any necessary path. However, having decreed, He is bound by His infinite faithfulness and truth to complete what He has begun, including the work He has begun in us, **Philippians 1:6**, *[For I am] confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

God, from His own sovereign volition, invented free will in two types of creatures, angels and mankind. Each of these creatures can choose for or against God. However, both categories of creatures were created for God's glory, **Revelation 4:11**, *“Worthy are You, Our Lord and Our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created.”* It is the will of God that mankind was created and that we exist, but it is also the will of God that we possess volition and the ability to choose for or against Him, **Proverbs 16:4**, *The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.*

This does not mean that God made the wicked simply to be wicked. It does mean that

ultimately God will be glorified by the volition of His creatures, whether positive or negative, **Romans 11:36**, *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him [be] the glory forever. Amen.*

The Decree of God is the adopted and chosen plan of God for all of His works. Even the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ was part of the Divine Decree, **Acts 2:23**, *This [Man] [Jesus Christ], delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put [Him] to death.*

Acts 4:27-28 *“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, Whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.”*

God the Father did not make Herod and Pontius Pilate do that they did, nor did He violate their free will and force them to crucify His Son. Such a thing would make Him unjust, and God cannot be anything but just and righteous. The Decree of God is His eternal purpose according to the counsels of His own will, whereby, for His own glory, He has foreordained all that will come to pass. However, His foreordaining something does not mean that He violates human volition.

The Divine Decree reveals to us so many wonderful things that God has provided for us in eternity past. God actually knew who would choose to believe in Christ, and knowing this, He provided the fantastic concepts of equal privilege and equal opportunity under predestination and election. Believers have been created in Christ Jesus for good works and good achievements, but only when they have momentum inside the predesigned plan of God. God prepared these assets in eternity past for every Church-age believer. We as believers should walk by means of our invisible assets, and when we do we will understand such passages as **Romans 6:4**, *...so we too might walk in newness of life*, or **Ephesians 4:1**, *...walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*

The Decree of God is His eternal purpose according to the counsels of His own wisdom and sovereign will. He has programmed into the Divine Decree all that will ever come to pass regarding the function of the human race in history. In the Decree, the sovereignty of God and free will of man coexist in human history.

There is another principle that comes out of this doctrine – the principle of pre-creation reality. All aspects of the Divine Decree were simultaneously known by the omniscience of God, and God also simultaneously decreed them. To appreciate the Divine Decree, one must understand the nature of omniscience as part of Divine essence. There are five aspects of the Divine Decree that are related to the purpose of election, and that were known simultaneously by the omniscience of God. In theology, these five aspects are known as the ‘Five Elective Decrees’. From these comes the concept of Lapsarianism.

Lapsarianism is a theological term for a subject that deals with the logical order of the Divine Decree, a subject that is practical as well as phenomenal. Lapsarianism provides the logical environment as well as the logical order for the Five Elective Decrees. It also provides a place for the insertion of escrow blessings in each believer's portfolio of invisible assets. Remember that all aspects of the Divine Decree occurred simultaneously in the mind of God, but we need to sort them out logically in order to explain the invisible assets and their relationship to the predesigned plan of God for each one of us as Church-age believers. Logical order means that although the entire Decree is one thought in the mind of God, the principle of cause and effect is involved in human perception and human understanding. The term Lapsarianism refers to the doctrine of the Divine Decree from the standpoint that man is a fallen being or creature. There are five schools of interpretation in the order and arrangement of the Five Elective Decrees. The first four are not doctrinally correct, but are briefly described here to show the inability of human viewpoint and religious philosophy to correctly apply doctrinal principles without an in-depth study of the original languages from one's pastor-teacher.

Supralapsarianism. This is also known as hyper-Calvinism or Beza's theory. It is stated as 'the decree to elect some to be saved and to reprobate all others'. It is the concept of double predestination, which is not only false, but a heresy. Its second decree provides salvation for the elect, which is the basis for limited atonement. Thirdly, it teaches of a decree to create both elect and non-elect mankind. The fourth decree permits the fall, and the fifth decree saves only the elect, or applies salvation to the elect in time. The problem with Supralapsarianism is two-fold: the decree to elect being placed first, prior to creation, and the decree of limited atonement.

Sublapsarianism. This is moderate Calvinism. Here the first order is to create all mankind, followed by the decree to permit the fall. This is followed by the decree to elect those who believe in Christ, and to leave in just condemnation those who do not believe in Christ. This is sometimes stated as the decree to elect some out of fallen mankind and leave the others to their misery. Finally is the decree to provide salvation for the elect only [limited atonement].

Infralapsarianism. This is a form of moderate Calvinism with an order very close to the correct Biblical view. First is the decree to create all mankind, followed by the decree to permit the fall. Then is the decree to provide salvation for all mankind [unlimited atonement], followed by the decree to elect some from among fallen mankind, and to leave others in their sin [those who will not believe in Christ]. Last is the decree to save the elect through faith in Christ or to apply salvation to those who believe.

Armenian Lapsarianism. This is represented by Richard Watson. Here the order of the decrees begins with the decree to create all mankind. Then the decree to permit the fall is followed by the provision of unlimited atonement. After that is their view of salvation by foreseen human virtue, faith, and obedience; hence the blasphemy of salvation by works. Finally, there is election as an act of God in time, which makes election synonymous with

experiential sanctification. This is not correct because it ignores the portfolio of invisible assets. The order is identical with that of the Infralapsarian view, with one exception. The Armenian view of election, which is made to follow the decree to provide salvation, is dependent on foreseen human virtue, faith, and obedience, whereas the Infralapsarian view of election invests it with sovereign choice apart from any foreseen human merit whatsoever. In mixing truth with error, this view is a distortion and therefore a heresy.

Biblical Lapsarianism. The correct order of the Five Elective Decrees is as follows:

1. God decreed the creation of all mankind with free will in the status of perfection for two reasons: to resolve the prehistoric angelic conflict, and to bring many sons into glory. The phrase, *bringing many sons to glory*, **Hebrews 2:10**, indicates that there is in fact a Christian way of life, a way to glorify God after salvation.
2. God decreed to permit the fall of mankind through the function of His Own determination and His Own volition as the extension of the angelic conflict into human history. Angels had a fall; therefore, man must have a fall to resolve the conflict. This duplicates Satan’s fall and the subsequent existence of fallen creatures [angels].
3. God decreed to provide eternal salvation for all mankind under the doctrine of unlimited atonement. God is fair and provides for all. He doesn’t arbitrarily assign creatures to Hell. Unlimited atonement means that all sins in human history were imputed to Jesus Christ on the cross and judged, so that Christ is now the issue and the sins are not, **2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 5:19; 1 Timothy 2:6, 4:10; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2.**
4. God decreed to leave the reprobate, or those who reject Christ as Savior, to their just condemnation.
5. God decreed simultaneously in eternity past both election and predestination for believers only. Under this point we have the Decree for historical election, including the election of true Israel, **Romans 9:6**, the election of the humanity of Christ in the dispensation of the Hypostatic Union, and the election of the Church as the body of Christ and Royal Family of God.

The differences in the four schools of thought regarding Lapsarianism can be seen in the table below:

| | Supralapsarianism | Sublapsarianism | Infralapsarianism | Armenian Lapsarianism |
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| 1 | Elect some and reprobate others | Create all mankind | Create all mankind | Create all mankind |
| 2 | Provide salvation for the elect only | Permit the fall | Permit the fall | Permit the fall |
| 3 | Create elect and non-elect | Elect some and reprobate others | Provide salvation for all of mankind | Provide salvation for all of mankind |
| 4 | Permit the fall | Provide salvation for the elect only | Elect those who have positive volition toward the cross | Salvation by works |
| 5 | Save only the elect through limited atonement | Save only the elect through limited atonement | Save the elect, or those who have positive volition toward the cross | Election by works in time |

Regarding the election of some and the reprobation of others under Supralapsarianism, one must now ask the question – elect what?? If there is no one created yet, who is being elected? And if no one has been created yet, let alone having fallen, just whom are you providing salvation for?

Sublapsarians place the decree to elect after the decree to permit the fall. In general, the Sublapsarian order is a rebuttal of the Supralapsarian order. The distinction between the Infralapsarians and the Sublapsarians is that the Infralapsarian places the decree to provide salvation before the decree to elect, while the Sublapsarian places the decree to elect before the decree to provide salvation. The Infralapsarian order, which places the decree to provide salvation before the decree to elect, allows for the doctrine of unlimited atonement, whereas the Sublapsarian order favors the theory of a limited atonement.

It is true that the doctrine of limited atonement is one of the five points of Calvinism, but not all who are rightfully classified as Calvinists accept the doctrine of unlimited atonement. It is equally true that all Armenians believe in unlimited atonement, but to hold the doctrine of unlimited atonement does not necessarily constitute one an Armenian.

Even though this subject is technical and complex, it is important because we need to understand the purpose and plan of God. The plan of God has to do with God gathering into one all-inclusive plan all the objects of salvation, whether in Heaven or on earth in

Christ, **Ephesians 1:9-10**. It is also called the mysterious purpose or plan, which had been hidden for ages in God, but is now made known to His saints, **Ephesians 3:4-11**, *By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; [to be specific,] that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly [places]. [This was] in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus Our Lord.*

The order of the Divine Decree is based on God being glorified, with all of His attributes bringing glory to Himself. Remember, the Decree of God is His eternal purpose according to the counsels of His own will, whereby for His own glory He has foreordained whatever comes to pass. Everything in the Divine Decree ultimately will bring glory to God, whether it be elect angels or fallen angels, believers or unbelievers, God's purpose will stand!

The Glory of God and the Divine Decree

The Decree unites the glory of God in one all-inclusive and final object, **Proverbs 6:4**, **Romans 11:36**, **Hebrews 2:10**, and **Revelation 4:11**. Since the Members of the Godhead were alone before all creation came into existence, the Decree of God concerned no one but Them. The Decree was designed to glorify Those for Whom it was made, not to glorify creatures who were not there. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had infinite glory in eternity past and will have it in eternity future. Whatever They do in the interim, from the creation of the universe to the conclusion of human history, must bring Them infinite praise and glorification, **Ephesians 1:3**, *Blessed [worthy of praise and glorification] [be] [belonging to] the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ.* But how does one give praise and glory to God when one's whole being is rejected by God as no good [**Isaiah 64:6**]? The answer is found in the Divine Decree, which includes a plan predesigned by God in eternity past that enables mankind to give Him all glory and praise for what He has done, without compromising His perfect character and righteousness.

Generally, the Decree relates to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ because He is the manifest Person of the Trinity. When history is terminated, the glory of God will be as perfect as it was before time began. Our failures do not stain the glory of God. His glory does not depend on us; rather, we depend on His glory.

Grace is born of the glory of God. Grace means that God does all the work and receives all the credit, which adds up to our blessing. Whether in time or eternity, Divine blessing is entirely grace. The only things related to us that can glorify God are what God Himself accomplishes, such as imputing His righteousness to us or providing us with Bible doctrine. This is why He despises our self-righteousness and hypocrisy. He has no use for our legalism and human good, and when we begin to glorify ourselves for our accomplishments, knowledge, works or experiences, we are kidding ourselves, and certainly not impressing God. Instead, we are acting in the power of the interlocking system of arrogance and hatred, and are either preoccupied with ourselves or antagonistic toward God and Bible doctrine. Once this occurs, God's justice will send suffering our way, not because of our sins, which were judged on the cross never to be judged again, but rather as a wake-up call to get us back in fellowship and on the right track toward spiritual maturity.

So, any time we are blessed by God, we can count on one thing – we definitely did not earn it or deserve it! All blessing is God's doing and God's grace exhibiting His glory, and we do not have to keep looking over our shoulder expecting to lose it! Once we understand His glory and His grace, we will certainly not want to intrude upon it. We will want to go along with it – and there lies the blessing. Since God Himself is the origin and subject of the Divine Decree, He will inevitably be glorified by every thought, decision and action in human history. All good and bad are included; sin, evil, and everything else will all add up to the ultimate glorification of God. His glory is never hindered and it never stops; it moves on with us or without us, no matter what we do.

For those who remain unbelievers, there is the certainty of eternity in Hell, and even in that, God's glory will remain uncompromised and untarnished. For those who believe in the saving work of Jesus Christ, there is eternity in Heaven, which is again consistent with the glory of God. Both in time and in eternity God's character is vindicated in every event that occurs.

The Decree of God allows maximum blessing for any believer, but recognizes that human volition can fall short of any potential. Only response to Bible doctrine can realize the maximum blessing desired by God for the believer. To give to God what is rightfully His, we must accept, through faith perception, the teaching of Bible doctrine from our right pastor-teacher. Then, through faith application, we must apply the doctrines that we've learned and metabolized to the details of our life. The extent to which any believer will use his volition toward advancing to the high ground of spiritual maturity was known in eternity past by the omniscience of God, and was decreed to be a part of God's all-inclusive will and purpose. God knew beforehand how far each believer would advance, as this was decreed as well. And in too many cases, the potential far exceeds the reality!

Both sin and the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross were fed into the computer of the Divine Decree. Sin is part of the permissive will of God, while the cross was the directive will. The cross neutralizes sin – indicating how God permits man's free will to

oppose Him, while maintaining His own integrity and being glorified in the end. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all knew that the two greatest systems of human law - Jewish and Roman - would meet at the cross of Christ, and that both would break down and fail. [In reality, the law did not fail; those administering it failed.] The Members of the Trinity knew that hearsay would be accepted as evidence, that facts would be omitted, and that each of Christ's seven trials would be a railroading of the law. Nevertheless, the precise manner in which Christ was convicted and crucified had been decreed in eternity past because God knew the free will decisions of very individual involved. He knew the mob mentality and the thoughts of every member of the crowd who would shout, "Crucify Him!" He foreknew the conspiracy of the religious Pharisees. He knew all about the nature of religion because religion is from Satan, and God has always known everything about Satan's thinking.

It is interesting to note that while Our Lord used His own free will to go to the cross, **John 10:17-18**, God the Father actually used the free will of his creatures to accomplish phase one of His plan, i.e., salvation. Christ's execution was the sum total of human evil and reversionism. It was the quintessence of sinfulness related to religion. The religious crowd crucified the Lord; yet, God's purpose was carried out by the free will choice of man, and even by the free will negative volition of the evil, reversionistic men in the Sanhedrin. It was religion that put Christ on the cross, but it was the justice of God the Father that used the crucifixion for His own purpose. Now that's a neat little ironic twist! God used religion, the devil's ace trump, to provide our salvation! Religion reached its peak only to inadvertently provide the grace way of salvation as the justice of God imputed the personal sins of mankind to Christ and judged them on the cross. This accomplishment once again shows that no matter how great the creature may be – and Satan is the smartest of all creatures – God is always greater. Through Satan's supreme masterpiece of religious conspiracy came our salvation. In spite of Satan's attempts, through the arrogant decisions and actions of the religious crowd, to prevent Christ from reaching the cross and providing our salvation, Our Lord was ultimately placed on the cross to die, ironically by those Satan had working for him. God not only uses the wrath of man to praise Him, **Psalms 76:10**, but He uses the wrath of angels as well. It was a combined satanic-human operation that put the Lord on the cross. Satan's objective was not carried out quite as he had planned, and through it all not one individual's volition was coerced. All Satan had accomplished was to contribute to Our Lord's objective. This is one example of the beauty of the Divine Decree!

Distinctions Between What God Permits and What He Desires

There are some distinctions that should be made clear in the Divine Decree with reference to God's laws, God's desires, and what God permits. The **laws of God** were made to regulate the behavior and conduct of both angelic and human creation, and these laws can be broken by man or angel through the use of their own free will. On the other

hand, the Decree of God cannot be broken by man, angelic creation, or even by God Himself. Since God is immutable, He cannot change, and once God made His sovereign, decreed decision, it was settled once and for all. The Decree was put into motion, and the rest, shall we say, is history.

Regarding the **desires of God**, the distinction is that, although the Decree includes His desires for His creation, it also includes the fact that those Divine desires would be rejected by the free will of some of those He Himself created. For example, God desires that all be saved, **1 Timothy 2:3-4**, *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God Our Savior, Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the [epignosis] knowledge of the truth* [Bible doctrine]. God's desire is that *all men* be saved under the doctrine of Unlimited Atonement, which demonstrates the desire of the sovereignty of God in the Divine Decree that no one should perish. Yet, human volition can and does choose to reject the saving work of Christ, resulting in the alternative – eternity in the Lake of Fire. Although God provided salvation for every creature, He knew who would accept as well as who would reject the substitutionary salvation work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Every individual has the free will to reject Christ as Savior, but God still provided salvation for that person in the Divine Decree, if he should choose rather to accept it. So, there are distinctions between **what God permits** and what He has decreed either as an absolute or as a desire.

In **1 Timothy 2:3-4**, God decreed as one of His own desires that all believers should come to epignosis knowledge of Bible doctrine. Unfortunately, most believers won't even reach the first stage of spiritual maturity, **Matthew 7:13-14**, *“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many [believers in the cosmic system] who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to [zoe] life, and there are few [believers living and functioning inside the predesigned plan of God] who find it.”*

God's desire is to bless us, and He has, but our own desires can cause us to reject His blessings. God knows about all of our negative decisions and actions, but He doesn't interfere with our free will; if He did, it would prevent the angelic conflict from ever being settled. For example, while sin and spiritual death are displeasing to God and incompatible with His Divine nature, they are nevertheless part of the Decree under the category of the fall of man. Many things that occur are the result of angelic or human free will acting contrary to, or independent of, God's desires. Nevertheless, God willed that these things would take place by His making our volition truly free. So, God's Decree rendered all things certain to occur and He decided that they would exist. In doing so, He did not interfere with angelic or human free will. By giving us volition, He decreed that both our good and bad decisions would certainly take place, even those contrary to His desires.

Many things taking place as part of the Decree are not actually the desires of God, although He still permits them. Sin, human good, and evil, for example, are part of the

Decree because they are performed by our free will. God desires the carrying out of His perfect will and sovereignty; however, both angelic and human creatures use their God-given free will and self-determination to violate the desires of God. God's desires are included in the Divine Decree, but a man can choose to reject God's desires for his life. So, the Decree is simply the all-inclusive will of God.

God does not want to cast His creatures into the Lake of Fire forever; however, it is decreed as so under the printout of retribution for all who express negative volition at God-consciousness or Gospel hearing. God does not desire the discipline of believers, but it is decreed to be a result of all carnality, apostasy and reversionism, for the purpose of getting the believer to rebound and put his spiritual life back on track. The same applies to mandates and principles of Bible doctrine. God's desire is for believers to adhere to His mandates, but He knows that some will not, so He therefore permits them to use their own free will to subsequently lose out, **1 Corinthians 3:15**, *If any man's work is burned up [at the judgment seat of Christ], he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.* The distinction is found in two types of decrees, efficacious and permissive.

Efficacious decrees are those determining the affairs of this life directly by physical causes, such as in **Job 28:24-27**, *“For He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When He imparted weight to the wind and meted out the waters by measure, when He set a limit for the rain and a course for the thunderbolt, then He saw it and declared it; He established it and also searched it out.* Efficacious decrees are also those determining the affairs of this life directly by spiritual forces, as in **Philippians 2:13**, *For it is God Who is at work in you, both to will and to work for [His] good pleasure,* and **Ephesians 2:8-10**, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, [it is] the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

Permissive decrees allow those things that are sinful or evil. The term ‘permissive’ indicates that God does not actively promote the execution of the decree even though these things have been determined by Him to take place. This is in contrast to His efficacious and Divine purpose for men to willingly do His good pleasure. In times past, God, by His own permission, has suffered nations to walk in their own ways, **Acts 14:16**. For the same reason, He gave the rebellious children of Israel their own evil desires, **Psalms 78:29, 106:15**.

God's permissive will does not determine to hinder the course of action that His creatures pursue, but it does determine to regulate and control the boundaries and results of such actions. God's permissive will permits whatsoever He thinks fit to permit and not hinder. By the same token, that which He determines to permit, He also intends to regulate, and not simply behold as an idle unconcerned spectator.

For example, it is written that God permitted the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, so that a demonstration of His Divine power might be fully displayed. This does not mean that God reached down into the heart of Pharaoh and deliberately made it hard. It does mean that Pharaoh continued to harden his own heart toward God, and God not only permitted it, but also used it for His Own glory. God brought in circumstances and situations in an effort to prompt Pharaoh to change his mind, but Pharaoh used his own free will to reject all Divine warnings.

That is why we read three times in the book of Exodus that Pharaoh hardened his heart, **Exodus 8:15**, *But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the Lord had said;* **Exodus 8:32**, *But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go;* **Exodus 9:34**, *But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart, he and his servants.* As a result of Pharaoh using his own volition to say no to God's desires, a multitude of Egyptians witnessed the power of Jehovah, **Exodus 14:4**, *"Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart [by allowing Pharaoh to make his own decisions], and he will chase after them [the Jews in the Exodus]; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord."* *And they did so.* **Joshua 2:10**, *"For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, ..."*

We each have a printout with our name on it, indicating our positive or negative volition toward God's sovereign will for our life. God's eternal and sovereign will for every believer is expressed in the Divine Decree, with printouts such as election, glorification, justification, and predestination. Everything about our life, including all decisions we would make, was read by God but not altered. We have our God-given privacy and we are permitted to make good or bad choices. The Divine Decree contains all data or facts regarding the function of the free will of man in history.

All aspects of logistical grace, including those who would receive it, how they would be provided for, and what their provisions and blessings would be, were fed into the Divine Decree. And God knew every problem, heartache, and situation that each and every one of us would ever face long before any of us even existed, and He provided a solution long before we were even here on earth facing the problem!

Once we really understand what the purpose and plan of God is all about, we should be motivated to never put anything ahead of Bible doctrine. Wrong priorities trigger wrong motivation. When we put pleasure, business, social life or family first, Bible doctrine takes a back seat. Putting anyone or anything before doctrine is putting that person or thing before the Lord Jesus Christ!

Mark 12:28-30 *One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord Our God is one Lord; and*

you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'."

Bible doctrine is the thinking of Our Lord, the mind of Christ. And somewhere down the line, a believer who is negative toward Bible doctrine will pay dearly. Sooner or later, he will be faced with a situation that requires problem-solving capabilities, which he will not have due to rejection of God's Word. He will have no way of escape, **1 Corinthians 10:13**, *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, Who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

A believer who failed to take in necessary doctrinal teaching will conclude that the devil is after him, and that's a lie! The devil doesn't attack those who are already on his side. Or the believer may cry out that the Lord is testing him, and that is arrogance. God only tests those who are faithful to His Word, and unfortunately, most believers lack enough metabolized doctrine to be faithful to the Word. They are simply miserable because of their own bad decisions and nothing else. All of their misery, unhappiness, and inability to cope are simply the result of making bad decisions, which basically entails negative volition toward doctrine.

Understanding the Divine Decree motivates the believer and creates awareness that God has a perfect, rational policy and plan for his life. Nothing is as important as the believer understanding God's plan for his life. This is because understanding must precede execution. No one can execute God's plan for his life until first of all he comprehends what that plan is and what the purpose behind that plan is!

To What Extent is the Human Will Free?

The Scriptures teach that there are restraints upon human volition. One example concerns unbelievers in that they, being children of disobedience, are energized by Satan, **Ephesians 2:1-2**, *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. In **John 8:44**, the Lord said to a group of unbelievers, "You are of [your] father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father."*

We are told in **Colossians 1:13** that, as believers, we have been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son. And we read in **Philippians 1:6**, *[For I am] confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus;* and in **Philippians 2:13**, *For it is God Who is at work in you, both to will and to work for [His] good pleasure.*

The entire human race, whether saved or unsaved, believer or unbeliever, in reality is not free from a superior influence. The mystery is the fact that this influence, as powerful as it is, is totally unrecognized within the range of human experience. The Bible even plainly asserts that God influences the unbeliever to some extent, and that Satan and his power influences believers. God's influence upon the unbeliever must be exercised if the unbeliever is going to turn to Him in saving faith. As the Lord declared in **John 6:44**, *"No one can come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him."*

Much confusion is caused by statements that God sometimes hinders spiritual vision and hardens hearts. God cannot and will not hinder the free will of mankind. God allows His creation to freely choose for or against His divine mandates and desires. Hardening of the heart [right lobe] and scar tissue in the soul are both simply the result of a lifestyle filled with bad decisions and negative volition toward the perception and application of Bible doctrine. Concerning Israel, **Isaiah 6:8-10** tells us: *Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed."*

When we find ourselves in personal, national, or international jeopardy, we need to realize that these things are permitted to continue in history so that the power of God may be demonstrated. Many times in human history, God has demonstrated His power by means of some evil ruler or evil people. He has also demonstrated His power by using believers who are negative toward Bible doctrine. In other words, God even uses the wrath of man to glorify Himself, **Psalms 76:10**, *For the wrath of man shall praise You; with a remnant of wrath You will gird Yourself.*

Romans 9:17-18 is an example of this principle: *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens [causes or allows to be hardened through one's own free will] whom He desires.* By means of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, God demonstrated His power in such a way that it affected two entire generations.

Remember what the doctrine of Heathenism teaches. If any person in any part of the world, no matter how geographically isolated, expresses in his soul, at the point of God-consciousness, a desire to know God and to have a relationship with Him, God will somehow, some way provide that information. Whatever it takes, that person will be given the opportunity to hear the Gospel and to respond to it.

There were a tremendous number of people who were positive at the point of God-consciousness in the eighteenth dynasty during the rule of Amenhotep II, the Pharaoh of the Exodus. God used the free will hardness of Pharaoh's heart to demonstrate His power, thereby spreading the Gospel throughout the region. The Exodus not only

included the Jews, but many of the Egyptians and other nationalities as well who accepted Christ as their Savior. Amenhotep II is a perfect illustration of the Divine Decree bringing glory to God even through man's negative volition.

Human limitations restrict our ability to know and understand God. Think of the types of people that God can use to accomplish His purpose! The Lord will allow some wicked person in our life to do things spitefully to us for the purpose of making us stronger spiritually. The Lord will even use the wickedness of people and angels to bring His plan and purpose to pass, **Job 21:30**, *“For the wicked is reserved for the day of calamity; they will be led forth at the day of fury.* Recall the woman who was caught in adultery, and how God used the wickedness of the self-righteous Pharisees to magnify His grace. We also saw the Lord's grace magnified in **Genesis 50:20**, with the evil jealousy of Joseph's brothers: *“As for you, you meant evil against me, [but] God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”* Inevitably the Lord will be glorified even when men perform the greatest evil, which they are certainly capable of performing, **2 Corinthians 13:8**, *For we can do nothing against the truth, but [only] for the truth.*

One of the most fascinating experiences we can have, in studying the Divine Decree, is to view history strictly from Divine viewpoint. We get a taste of it from the study of Scripture, but more often we look at an event and say that it is a terrible tragedy because we do not see it as God sees it.

God even has a part in the blinding and influencing of the wicked. He does not create the evil heart, but rather, He allows to be brought into overt action that which is within the heart, in order to accomplish His divine purpose. Remember that God not only created the creature, but also the creature's volition and free will. In that respect, human volition and free will are used by God to accomplish His plans and purpose. He created the creature's volition to be used as an instrument by which He might accomplish his sovereign purpose; therefore, it is inconceivable that the creature's volition would ever obstruct His purpose in any way. So, we come to a question that has engaged the attention of theologians in every age. If God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, is human liberty then taken away?

The answer is that the Divine Decree exerts no force or influence upon the will and volition of mankind, and while it ensures the future of events, it leaves them to be accomplished in the exercise of our liberty. While the Decree determines that some things should be brought to pass necessarily, it also determines that other things should be brought to pass freely.

God has decreed not only that men should act, but also that they should act freely and agreeably to their rational nature. He may desire a certain action, but men, being free agents, have the opportunity to act differently. It is God's will alone that is to be considered, and not the means by which His will has been determined. If God

foreordained certain actions and then placed men in such circumstances so that the actions would certainly take place, then men are still responsible for the actions, which are their own, because they acted voluntarily. Liberty does not consist in the power of acting or not acting, but in acting from choice. The choice is determined by something in the mind itself, or by something external influencing the mind; but whatever is the cause, the choice makes the action free and the agent accountable. Therefore, it is possible to reconcile the freedom of the will of mankind with God's absolute Decree.

By this theory, human actions appear to be as necessary as the motions of matter according to the laws of gravitation and attraction, and man seems to be a machine, conscious of his movements, and consenting to them, but impelled by something other than himself. The tie that connects the Divine Decree and human liberty is invisible. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high and we cannot attain it. If everything in religion were level to the comprehension of reason, there would be no room for faith. It is better to believe humbly than to reason presumptuously, which leads to the denial of the immutability of the Divine counsels or the freedom of the human will. That makes man a machine, and God the author of sin. The unrestrained, sovereign purpose of God is seen in the ordering of the succession of the ages. That God has a program of the ages is disclosed in many passages, **Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Daniel 2:31-45, 7:1-28, 9:24-27; Hosea 3:4,5; Matthew 23:37 thru 25:46; Acts 15:13-18; Romans 11:13-29; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Revelation 2:1 thru 22:31.**

The doctrine of providence may be extended to include nearly all-natural and Biblical theism. It falls into four categories:

1. **Preventative will of God.** God uses parents, government, laws, customs, public opinion, His Word, His Spirit, and the conscience as a means to the providential hindering of evil, **Genesis 20:6, Psalms 19:13.**
2. **Permissive will of God.** This includes all that God allows and does not restrain, although He may not actually desire it, **cf. Deuteronomy 8:2, 2 Chronicles 32:31, Hosea 4:17 and Romans 1:24, 28.**
3. **Directive will of God.** The method by which God guides the ways of men, often without their being conscious of that guidance, **cf. Genesis 50:20, Psalms 76:10, Isaiah 10:5, Acts 4:28.**
4. **Determinative will of God.** By which action of God, He decides and executes all things after the counsel of His own will. Though many objectives are disclosed, the Supreme purpose of God in creation seems to be the demonstration of His grace. The manifestation of Divine grace as it is in Christ, **Titus 2:11**, and as it will be displayed by the redeemed in glory, **Ephesians 2:7**, is not only within the Divine Decree, but is a major feature of that Decree. One example of something that God willed to exist is you – a rational, free will individual living in the twenty-

first century. You and your volition were decreed billions of years ago, and you exist today because you are part of a plan determined in eternity past.

God's Decree rendered all things as certain to occur; He decided that they would exist. In doing so, He did not interfere with angelic or human free will. In fact, He decreed that we would have free will in the first place. In giving us volition, He also decreed that our decisions, whatever they might be, would certainly take place – even those contrary to His desires. Being omniscient, God knew ahead of time what we would decide, and He not only decreed that those decisions would exist – He decreed the exact manner, consistent with His integrity, in which He would handle our free will decisions. The Decree of God is the sovereign choice of Divine will [His attribute of sovereignty] and His mentality [omniscience], by which all things are brought into being, controlled, and made subject to His pleasure, resulting in His glorification, **Isaiah 46:10, Ephesians 1:9**.

Anything that the members of the Trinity decide to originate is determined with two concepts in mind: it is for Their pleasure, and it is for Their glory. Mankind does a variety of things for its pleasure and entertainment, but God's pleasure is somewhat broader in scope. His perfect happiness is part of His infinite character, so His pleasure is not impulsive or frivolous. In eternity past, God snapped His fingers, as it were, and billions upon billions of light years of space instantly came into being. He then created beautiful, powerful, free will creatures called angels. Their history is largely undisclosed to us, but we do know that from their own free will decisions, these creatures got out of line, resulting in the fall of Satan and subsequent revolt that began the angelic conflict.

God of course always knew that the angels would revolt. Therefore, in the same instant that He decreed to create the universe and the angels, He also decreed that at a certain point in time He would create another type of creature – mankind. Like the angels, this new creature would also have free will and be designed to share God's happiness. But mankind and his progeny would also become the demonstration of the fullness of God's essence to those angels who had impugned God's character. So, for God's own pleasure, he created the first man, Adam. Now, long after the fall of Adam, God's pleasure is our adjustment to His justice. Salvation, spirituality, and spiritual maturity all free God to bless us.

We should have no illusions about ourselves. We exist not to glorify ourselves and certainly not to impress God, but rather to line up with His pleasure and His glory. God has always existed in perfect glory, and anything He does reflects His glory and results in His glorification. God does not depend on mankind for His pleasure or His glory; He enjoyed these things in eternity past when no one else even existed. He expresses His glory in us and toward us; mankind is here as part of God's pleasure and glory.

It is also the pleasure of God to permit creatures to exercise their own volition. No event is directly affected or caused by the Decree. The Decree merely establishes what will be caused, but the Decree itself is not the cause. The fact that a thought or action on your

part is in the Decree does not mean that the Decree caused you to think it or do it. The cause is your own free will. Your thoughts are in the Decree because billions and billions of years ago God's omniscience knew what you would think, and part of His planning was the fact that you would think it.

The Decree and Divine Imputations

All imputations are part of the Divine Decree and the organization of God's plan. There are seven imputations in the plan of God:

1. **Human life imputed to the soul.** Human life is imputed to the soul at birth, and it remains in the soul forever, **Ecclesiastes 12:7, Isaiah 45:2.**

Job 33:4 *“The Spirit of God has made me [a human being], and the breath [soul life] of the Almighty gives me [human] life.”*

Genesis 2:7 tells us when life began: *Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*

The Lord tells us that He is the author of human life, **Isaiah 43:7**, *“Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made.”*

Without soul life, biological life does not become a human being. Biological life originates with our parents and soul life originates from God at birth. Only Adam and the woman were given biological and soul life simultaneously at the point of original creation. This is because neither Adam nor the woman was ever inside a womb. There was no such thing as a womb at creation. Soul life begins at the point of physical birth as one of two real imputations from God. God imputes human life to the format soul at birth; therefore, God gives human life.

Selection is a technical term related to the divine imputation of human life at the point of physical birth. God is the inventor of human life, just as He is the Creator. At the moment of physical birth, God imputes human life to the soul, and the individual becomes alive.

God did not have to impute life to you, but He did. The Bible teaches that a fetus dying in the womb is never actually a person, since God did not impute soul life to that fetus at the point of birth.

Consider **Job 10:18-19**, *“Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Would that I had died and no eye had seen me? I should have been as though I had not*

been, carried from womb to tomb.” Job is saying that as long as he was in the womb, he was not a human being because he had no human life until God imputed it to his soul at physical birth. Verse 19 explains the last phrase in verse 18. Job describes the limits of life – out from the womb and to the tomb. Human life exists out from the womb [from birth] to the tomb, and the limits of human life are from birth to death. This is the sphere during which the angelic conflict is being resolved. We are given life to resolve the issue of the angelic conflict; there is no resolution to the angelic conflict either inside the womb or inside the tomb. God gives human life at birth, and takes it away at death. The womb is not a part of the angelic conflict and it does not contain human life. At birth, God creates soul life and imputes it to biological life, and at death, God removes soul life from biological life, and for the believer, takes that soul to Heaven. If God does not give soul life at birth, there is no soul life and there is no existence.

Job also recognizes that he would have been automatically saved if he had died as soon as God gave him soul life, **Job 3:11**, *“Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?”* This verse clearly says that you cannot die as a human being in the womb, because no one *is* a human being in the womb. Job could not die before birth because he was not a human being prior to birth.

Job 3:12-15 *“Why did the knees receive me, and why the breasts, that I should suck? For now [if I had died when I came forth from the womb] I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest, with kings and [with] counselors of the earth, who rebuilt ruins for themselves; or with princes who had gold, who were filling their houses [with] silver.”*

In verses 13-15, Job is saying that if he had died at birth, *“I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept then, I would have been at rest,”* indicating that he would have been with those who had died before him. However, notice the next verse, **Job 3:16**, *“Or like a miscarriage which is discarded, I would not be, as infants that never saw light.”*

The life that the Lord gives at birth, He takes at death, and that life goes on forever. Biological life is only temporary, while soul life is permanent. It is not surprising that the Bible emphasizes human experience as existing between birth and death – not conception and death. A human being does not become a human being until after birth. In **Ecclesiastes 3:2**, *A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted*, notice it does not say there is a time to be conceived.

Exodus 21:22 *“If men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she gives birth prematurely, yet there is no injury, he shall surely be fined at the woman’s husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges [decide].”*

At the moment of physical birth, God imputes human life to the soul, at which point the individual becomes alive. That is selection. Because God selected those whom He willed to receive imputed soul life at physical birth, life has meaning, purpose and definition for everyone, regardless of environment or circumstances, historical prosperity or historical adversity. God knew in eternity past who would be a member of the human race, and He knew simultaneously in His omniscience who would choose to believe in Jesus Christ. God selected those who would ultimately believe before He elected them. Selection must precede election.

2. **Adam's original sin imputed to the old sin nature.** The second imputation that is part of the Divine Decree is the imputation of Adam's original sin to the old sin nature, which automatically condemns each member of the human race at birth, **Psalms 51:5**, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.* Condemnation precedes salvation, so all must be condemned before they can be saved. Therefore, all are condemned at birth, at the very moment that soul life is provided by God. Those who do not or cannot reach the age of accountability, such as children and the mentally impaired, receive automatic salvation. The sin nature is part of biological life and is not passed on by God, as noted in **Romans 6:6** and **7:14**, **Galatians 5:16**, and **Ephesians 2:3**.

Psalms 58:3 *The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.*

Isaiah 48:8 *"You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; and you have been called a rebel from birth."*

Romans 5:19 *For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.*

3. **Sins imputed to Jesus Christ on the cross.** The third imputation in the Divine Decree took place on the cross when the sins of the world were imputed to Jesus Christ during His spiritual death.
4. **Perfect righteousness to the new believer at salvation.** This is a judicial imputation that creates a grace pipeline for the imputation of all blessing to the believer.

2 Corinthians 5:21 *He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Philippians 3:9 *[I may gain Christ] and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from [the] Law, but that which is through faith in*

Christ, the righteousness which [comes] from God on the basis of faith.

5. **Eternal life imputed to the human spirit.** At the point of faith in Christ, eternal life is imputed to the human spirit, which is simultaneously created by God the Holy Spirit. This is called regeneration and provides eternal security, since once eternal life is given, God can never take it away.

Titus 3:5-6 *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ Our Savior.*

6. **Blessing in time imputed to perfect righteousness.** This imputation is very vital when we consider that the Divine Decree is designed to bring glory to God. Blessing in time is imputed to the perfect righteousness previously imputed to the believer. This takes place when the believer grows spiritually, and especially when he cracks the maturity barrier.
7. **Blessing for eternity imputed at Judgment Seat of Christ.** Blessing for eternity is imputed to the supergrace believer's perfect righteousness at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

The omniscience of God has taken cognizance of mankind's fall and has graciously provided a plan based on these seven imputations from Divine justice. These seven imputations provide maximum blessing for mankind in time and eternity.

The Decree contains the historical reality of every member of the human race by degree of attainment. Non-meritorious human volition can fall short of any potential in God's plan. To what extent each individual would advance in this plan was known in eternity past by the omniscience of God, and fed into the Divine Decree. In many cases, the potential exceeds the reality; however, only the reality was decreed. From this fact emerges the principle that the attainment of Divine blessing through imputation is the means God has chosen to glorify Himself and to give Himself pleasure. Therefore, the glory of God is related to the believer's advance to maturity and resultant imputation of Divine blessing.

If we desire to glorify God, we must grow spiritually. To grow spiritually, doctrine must be our daily delight. We attain capacity only through persistent positive volition and the daily function of perception, metabolization and application of Bible doctrine.

Hebrews 10:35-36 *Therefore, do not throw away your confidence [in the Word of God], which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God [fulfillment of the predesigned plan of God], you may receive what was promised [imputation of escrow blessings for time].*

Consistency is the secret to reaching spiritual maturity. The biggest deterrents to being consistent are distractions, entertainment, mental attitude sins, and inordinate desire taking the place of contentment. There has always been, and there continues to be, an attack on the daily intake of Bible doctrine. We live in a day and age when the kingdom of darkness actually uses believers to discredit doctrinal teaching and attack another believer's commitment to its daily intake. Satan's kingdom tries to make it seem that only fanatics take in Bible doctrine daily. But what does Scripture say? The Lord Jesus Christ made doctrine His delight every day, **Proverbs 8:30**, *Then I was beside Him, [as] a master workman; and I was daily [His] delight, rejoicing always before Him.*

Doctrine, or *chakmah* wisdom, promises blessings to those who listen to it daily, **Proverbs 8:34**, *Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts.* The Lord Jesus Christ made it crystal clear that we would need the Word of God to survive, **Matthew 4:4**, *But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'."* **Luke 9:23**, *And He was saying to [them] all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me."*

Do not be deceived by individuals who are sent by the kingdom of darkness to try and stop your momentum in the predesigned plan of God. Spiritual momentum in God's predesigned plan is the only way we can fulfill the purpose of the Divine Decree, which is glorification of God. It is easy to see why Satan loves to discredit the daily intake of Bible doctrine.

The Decree unites in one final and all-inclusive objective – the glory of God, **Proverbs 16:4**, *The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil;* **Romans 11:36**, *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him [be] the glory forever. Amen;* **Hebrews 2:10**, *For it was fitting for Him, for Whom are all things, and through Whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings;* **Revelation 4:11**, *"Worthy are You, Our Lord and Our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."*

Being alone before all creation existed, the Decree of God concerned no one but the members of the Trinity, and related only to Their eternal glory. There is nothing mankind can do to promote God's glory. We can glorify God, but we cannot promote His glory; neither does our failure stop His glory. As the origin and subject of the Divine Decree, God will be glorified by every thought, decision and action in history. This means that His plan moves on with or without us. The plan of God never stops moving.

God is pleased by the momentum and advance of believers operating within his predesigned plan. Whereas salvation is a free gift, **Romans 6:23**, *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus Our Lord,* divine good depends on human volition, **Matthew 10:42**, *"And whoever in the name of a disciple*

gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” The issue is that our free will matters. Our eternal life is now in the making, and our priorities and day-by-day attitude toward Bible doctrine will determine precisely what, if anything, we will receive at the judgment seat of Christ. It takes only one positive decision to receive eternal life; however, it takes many, many positive decisions during life on earth to receive the great decorations, honors and rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Mankind is given free will and a choice, and this is why Scripture says, **1 Peter 4:5**, *But they will give account to Him Who is ready to judge the living and the dead;* **Romans 14:12**, *So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.*

The Divine Decree is executed by each and every free will choice made by man. God does not tamper with our decisions or the effects of them; however, He does provide for us the doctrine necessary to meet any situation in life when it occurs. This is one reason for the doctrine of Separation. There are times that we need to separate from certain individuals because they will lead us in the wrong direction.

The Decree of God provides for the fact that every act of human volition is free on the part of each individual. God does not tamper with anyone’s free will. For example, when we are praying for someone’s salvation, we cannot pray that they will believe – only that they will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel. God knew before we even existed how we would respond in any given situation. Even if He desires to bring a situation into our life that will cause a negative reaction on our part, but in turn will bring glory to Himself, He has the right to do so.

This brings us to the principle of the potter and the clay. The entire human race is regarded as clay in the hands of the Potter. It is the Potter’s wheel of authority that shapes the life of each and every one of us, **Romans 9:14-21**, *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” So then it [does] not [depend] on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.” So then, He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this”, will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?*

Remember that the sovereignty of God and free will of man coexist in human history. God has provided not only His authority, but also the authority He has delegated to others, to aide us in steering through life with virtue derived from humility, thus having a marvelous life. Whether a person becomes a vessel of honor or one of dishonor depends

on the function of one's own volition as related to Divine authority. The difference between being a vessel of honor and a vessel of dishonor is our response to authority. What does a potter do with suitable vessels? He keeps them. As for those of dishonor, he smashes them, and God has designed a system for doing just that. God provides a potter's wheel, which is legitimate authority in life. Whether an individual becomes a vessel of honor or of dishonor depends on the function of his own volition and his attitude toward authority. The potter decides how a vessel will be molded; however, the vessel will be molded only as it responds to the potter's wheel. And just as a potter doesn't pat out the vessel by hand, but rather uses a wheel, so God also uses a system – authority. The issue is how we, the clay, respond to the potter's wheel. God has delegated authority in life so that humility, the basis of virtue, can be attained.

There are some very important technical terms that we as believers must understand with reference to the Decree, each one having to do with a different aspect of the plan of God for our life. The first is **omniscience**. The Omniscience of God is defined as 'all knowing' and describes God's attribute of complete knowledge of all that is knowable. God's knowledge not only spans the reality of past, present and future events, but also includes each and every possibility of what could have been, and each and every 'what if' throughout the course of history. To say His knowledge far surpasses the little that man has accumulated is certainly an understatement, **Isaiah 55:8-9**, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,*" declares the Lord. "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.*" In eternity past, God filtered all possible knowable events, decisions, actions, thoughts, occurrences, etc. through the attributes of His perfect essence, selecting the most perfect ones as His Divine Decree. His choice is what we call reality.

The second term to be defined is the **Divine Decree** itself. The Decree of God is His eternal, holy, wise and sovereign purpose, comprehending simultaneously all things that ever were or will be, in their causes, conditions, successions and relations, and determining the certainty of their future. In other words, out of all the options known to God in His omniscience, one sequence of events for mankind was perfectly chosen and decreed to be reality.

The third term to be defined is **foreknowledge**. In the Greek, the term is *proginosko*, which means 'to know beforehand'. Foreknowledge is an aspect of God's omniscience, by which all things past, present and future, and all things eternal, material, intellectual, spiritual and actual are known to Him. His foreknowledge simultaneously recognizes every situation as well as every actual decision made by His people. The foreknowledge of God concentrates strictly on the Decree and nothing else. He does not force things to happen, but merely perceived in the past what was certain to occur in time.

In eternity past, the omniscience of God had you personally in mind, so much so that He went through every single known option available, in search of the absolute perfect plan for your life, with the purpose of giving you His highest and best. This brings us to our

fourth term, which is **predestination**. The Greek word for predestination is *proorizoo*, which means to obtain something beforehand. Predestination is the provision of the sovereignty of God in eternity past for the believer, which enables him to execute God's plan, purpose and will for his life. Everything the believer needs to execute God's plan for his life has been provided by God prior to the restoration of the earth, **Ephesians 1:4-5**.

Predestination also provides equal privilege and equal opportunity for the believer. Equal privilege means that God has placed the believer into union with Jesus Christ at the moment he accepted Christ as his Savior. We as believers are positionally seated with the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God the Father. We share in Christ's election, **Ephesians 1:4**; His destiny, **Ephesians 1:5**; His sonship, **Galatians 3:26**; His heirship, **Romans 8:16**; His priesthood, **Hebrews 10:10**; His sanctification, **1 Corinthians 1:2**; His royalty, **1 Peter 1:11**; His righteousness, **2 Corinthians 5:21**; and His eternal life, **1 John 5:11-12**. Equal opportunity means that God provided for each and every believer his every own predesigned plan. The believer is instructed to live and function inside that plan, thereby executing the Christian way of life based on the mystery doctrine of the Church-age. In entering this plan by the function of rebound, thereby becoming filled with the Holy Spirit, the believer starts walking within the plan by perceiving, metabolizing and applying Bible doctrine to his life. In advancing to the spiritual high ground, the believer begins to personally love God, while having virtue love toward those around him. A few periods of suffering for blessing, and the believer is on his way to the winner's gate of spiritual maturity where he receives great blessings, thereby glorifying God.

This brings us to the fifth technical term – **election**. The Greek word *eklegoo* means to be divinely selected. God has provided logistical support for every believer, meaning everything that is needed to keep soul and body together while living on earth. God has also provided for each believer a royal priesthood for the purpose of representing himself under privacy before God, and for living and functioning inside the predesigned plan. Every believer receives logistical support provision so he can stay alive as a royal priest to grow in grace, reach the high ground of spiritual maturity, and receive God's highest and best, thereby glorifying God in time and eternity. This is referred to in **Ephesians 3:20** as, *abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*.

In addition, God wills for every one of us to rule in the Millennium. However, none of these things will ever come to pass simply because God wills it; the believer must also respond to and follow God's plan. Election then, even more so than foreknowledge and predestination, is motivation for the Christian way of life. In understanding election, we will receive motivation from God the Father for living our life, which will keep us from falling apart when things do not go our way.

The next technical term is **justification**, which comes from the Greek word *diakioo*. By definition it means vindication, or the legal act of God where He declares the believer

righteous because He has imputed to the believer His perfect righteousness. This legal act occurs at the moment anyone chooses to believe in the substitutionary spiritual death of Jesus Christ on the cross, **Romans 3:26-28**, *For the demonstration, [I say], of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. As always, it is God Who has done all the work and receives all the credit. Justification, therefore, is based on the principle of grace, **Romans 3:24**, *Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; **Titus 3:7**, *So that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to [the] hope of eternal life. Although man, through his arrogance, will continue to try and justify himself by keeping the law, there has never been nor will there ever be justification by human works, **Galatians 2:16**, *Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.****

Our last technical term is **glorification**. It comes from the Greek word *doxazoo*, which means to honor, praise, adorn with luster, clothe with splendor, or to exalt to a glorious rank. Every believer, whether a spiritual winner or loser, will have a resurrected body and attain glorification. However, for the winner believer, in addition to his resurrected body he will receive many wonderful rewards and decorations, not only in time but also in the Millennium and throughout eternity.

Romans 8:28-32 *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to [His] purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to become] conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified [doxazoo]. What then shall we say to these things? If God [is] for us, who [is] against us? He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*

Practical Application of the Divine Decree

Since the Decree is the sum total of God's plan and purpose in eternity past, it centers on the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, **Ephesians 1:4-6, 1 John 3:23**. Therefore, the free will of man must face the issue of Christ and His work on the cross. Faith in Christ is man's entrance into God's plan of grace. At the cross, the sovereignty of God and the free volition of man meet for a purpose – the glory of God and the benefit of mankind. The basis for this meeting is the justice of God. Under the Divine policy of grace, God accomplishes the work of salvation while man receives the benefits apart from human

merit or ability. The definite antagonism between Divine justice and human works indicates that human works are disregarded in every phase of the plan of grace, **Isaiah 64:6, Romans 3:10**.

God's plan in eternity past was designed to include all events and actions, in relation to their causes and conditions, as part of one indivisible system, with every link being a part of the integrity of the whole. Each link is as important as the whole. The whole is the integrity of God making all the links properly relate through grace. This is how He makes all things work together for good. Without violating human volition, God has designed a plan so perfect that it includes directives, provision, preservation, function, and cause and effect for each and every believer. Under this plan, God has decreed to accomplish some things directly [such as creation and salvation], some through secondary agencies [such as Israel or the Church], and some through individuals [such as the Apostle Paul, or any one of us]. Thus, there are primary, secondary, and tertiary functions within the plan of God. It does not matter into which of these categories any action falls, since all constitute one great, all-comprehensive, perfect, eternal and unchangeable plan, without loss of integrity. We are part of a magnificently perfect plan designed to graciously give us everything that is wonderful in time and eternity. And if our spiritual momentum carries us into supergrace, we will be super-blessed!

The Decree of God is consistent with human freedom. God is not unfair, and He does not limit or coerce our freedom. He does, however, graciously provide guidance as to how we should use our volition. The only revelation of the Divine Decree is found in Scripture; therefore, the Christian's highest priority should be the reception of Bible doctrine. There are things that God permits, and others that He causes. There are things that please Him, and others that do not. But God always recognizes reality, and this is one of the most important aspects of our relationship with Him. Everything that is decreed is done so in reality, and like God, we too must face the facts. And because God deals with reality, His plan must recognize things for what they are. His solutions start with what is, rather than what is not. There is no wishful thinking in God. He never rationalizes, He never blesses us out of sentimentality, and He never blesses us because of our character, our plans, our ideas, our schemes or our self-righteousness. He blesses us only on the basis of His character. Anyone who keeps trying to vindicate himself before God will never understand the righteousness of God, how it relates to Divine justice, and how both righteousness and justice characterize the Decree.

It would be reasonable, and honoring to God, to conclude that God's plan as He ordained it and as it is being achieved, is now and in the end will prove to be the best plan and purpose that could have possibly been devised by infinite wisdom and consummated by infinite power; a plan that will be of supreme satisfaction to infinite love.

¹ All verses are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, unless otherwise noted. Corrected translations by Pastor Robert R. McLaughlin from the original Greek or Hebrew text appear in brackets.

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